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SUBJECT: FIRST VICE PRESIDENT-ELECT LAURA CHINCHILLA

REF: SAN JOSE 444

¶1. Summary: Laura Chinchilla was chosen by Oscar Arias to be his first vice presidential running mate in the 2006 election. Along with Kevin Casas as second vice president, Arias and Chinchilla will take office on May 8. Chinchilla, currently a member of the Legislative Assembly and formerly minister of public security, has a solid reputation as a smart and serious public servant. She has been a good contact of the Embassy and a strong supporter of U.S.-Costa Rican narcotics interdiction cooperation and of CAFTA-DR. However, her leanness of anything that smacks of military caused her to reject U.S. plans for an International Law Enforcement Academy in Costa Rica. Chinchilla will be a key member of the Arias administration on national security policy. End Summary

¶2. Laura Chinchilla Miranda, born in San Jose in 1950, has served as a deputy in the Legislative Assembly since 2002, chairing the Judicial Affairs Committee and secretary of the International Affairs and Foreign Trade committee. She is a stalwart of the National Liberation Party (PLN). She has been a strong proponent of judicial and public security reforms, political institutional reform, and childhood and adolescence issues. She supports CAFTA-DR. Though Chinchilla has been cast as being too "pro-American" due to her support of joint counternarcotics operations, she has also stood her ground in opposing U.S. policies that she believed were counter to Costa Rican interests. Most notably, Chinchilla was the key legislator responsible for derailing Embassy efforts to establish the International Law Enforcement Academy in San Jose in early 2004. Chinchilla was concerned about the possibility of military personnel attending the academy, which she felt was counter to Costa Rica's long-standing tradition of eschewing any involvement with the military.

¶3. Before being elected legislator, Chinchilla served as Minister of Public Security (1996-1998), Vice Minister of Public Security (1994-1996), President of the Counternarcotics Intelligence Center, and President of the National Migration Council. As Minister of Public Security, she initiated the process of professionalization of the public security forces, which enhanced public confidence in local law enforcement. She initiated reforms to "demilitarize" the police, giving them an unambiguously civilian character and promoting respect for the rule of law. She also advocated decentralization of the police function to promote community participation in maintaining security at the local level.

¶4. Chinchilla's other previous positions include adviser on the modernization of public security systems in Latin American and African countries and consultant in areas related to state and judicial reform in Latin America for international organizations such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Development

Program (UNDP), and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Similarly, Chinchilla was consultant for the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), the Central American Dialogue for Security and Demilitarization of the Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress, and the Foundation for Peace and Democracy (FUNPADEM) on projects concerning civil society and public security.

¶15. Chinchilla hails from a family with a tradition of public service. Her father, Rafael Angel Chinchilla, served as Comptroller General of the Republic. Her brother, Adrian Chinchilla, served as Mayor of Escazu, a suburb in the San Jose Province. Chinchilla takes pride in noting that she is a true child of Costa Rica, having been born in a public hospital and attended a public elementary school. After her graduation from Colegio LaSalle, a private high school, Chinchilla attended the University of Costa Rica where she obtained a degree in Political Science. She also holds a master's degree in Public Policy from Georgetown University.

¶16. In 1993, while studying at the International University of Florida, Chinchilla met Jose Maria Rico, a former criminology professor from Spain, whom she later married. Given their shared interest and expertise in public policy and crime deterrence, the two collaborated on a 1997 article entitled, "Community Prevention of Crime: Latin American Perspectives," in which they advocated the regional implementation of a European-style "social preventive" model of crime prevention.

¶17. While Chinchilla is accustomed to political celebrity, she tries to maintain a "normal" existence, and jealously guards her family and private time. While Minister of Public Security, her daily routine included time away from the office to nurse her infant son, Jose Maria, who was born in ¶1996. Her leisure activities have included biking, jogging, golf, dance, and music. At public functions, Chinchilla is usually reserved and serious, a trait she shares in common with Arias.

¶18. In a recent press interview Chinchilla stated that she is not interested in becoming "a decorative figure" in the new administration. When Arias announced her nomination as candidate for the first vice presidency, he said that Chinchilla is "a woman who has always shown balance between firmness and tolerance, a woman who has faced the challenge of being a professional, a mother, and a wife in a still chauvinist world."

¶19. Comment: In Costa Rican politics, the president has the prerogative to assign his two vice presidents whatever portfolios he wishes. Chinchilla is likely to be tasked with security and corruption issues, while Second Vice President Kevin Casas (septel) will be in charge of social reforms and infrastructure rehabilitation. We expect that Chinchilla, new Minister of the Presidency Rodrigo Arias, and the next minister of public security, not yet named, will be the officials primarily responsible for national security policy.

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